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UNCLAS KATHMANDU 000977

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: Maoists Attack Orphan School

REFS: A) Kathmandu 933, B) Kathmandu 828

Bomb at Foreign-Funded Boarding School

1. (U) Insurgents set off a bomb at a well-known INGO-funded orphanage and boarding school in Surkhet district 400 km west of Kathmandu late on May 17. No one was injured in the blast, caused by a pressure cooker bomb placed in the window of the principal's residence. The event garnered wide press coverage throughout the country May 19 and 20, and the Maoists were roundly criticized for it.

No Recent Threat Preceded Attack

2. (U) The Chief District Officer (CDO) for Surkhet confirmed press reports of the incident. The CDO added that although the school had received threats from the Maoists last year, there had been none made recently. [Note: A press report quotes the school's principal saying the Maoists had never threatened his school. End Note.] He also noted that all other boarding schools in Surkhet had been closed since last year due to the threat of Maoist violence. [Comment: Maoist dogma is critical of and threatening to private schools and private schools have been attacked in the past. Recently a Maoist bomb exploded next to an orphanage in Kathmandu (Ref B). End Comment.]

School for Orphans, Disadvantaged Kids

3. (U) About 500 children attend the school, an SOS Children's Village funded by the Hermann Gmeiner Foundation in Innsbruck, Austria. The SOS Children's Villages are world famous for their work with orphans and other disadvantaged children at facilities around the world. Of the 500 pupils, 145 are orphans who board at the school. Nearly all the rest are day students from disadvantaged families who attend tuition-free. The school has been closed until further notice due to the attack.

4. (SBU) The National Director for SOS Nepal left the capital for Surkhet May 18 to inspect the damage. He told the principal of an SOS school in Kathmandu that he was trying to console the children, who were still panicked. The bomb blast rendered dormitories unusable, so students had to double up at night. No classrooms were damaged.

Comment

5. (SBU) The attack is a new low for the Maoists. Coming almost a week after Maoists raided a university in nearby Dang district (Ref A), the attack on SOS suggests that the Maoist movement has finally descended to primitive anarchism. Attacks on orphans and disadvantaged children have not won the Maoists any friends, and in fact have helped sway public opinion against them.

MALINOWSKI